

ED 398 573

CS 215 353

AUTHOR Magnotto, Joyce Neff
TITLE Grounded Theory: Research as Praxis.
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (47th, Milwaukee, WI, March 27-30, 1996).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classification; Data Analysis; Higher Education; Qualitative Research; *Research Methodology; *Writing Instruction; Writing Laboratories; Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS *Grounded Theory; Theoretical Orientation

ABSTRACT

In the mid-1960s, social scientists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed grounded theory as a systematic and rigorous method of qualitative data analysis leading to "the discovery of theory from data." In grounded theory, the researcher applies a set of coding procedures to the data until a provisional theory emerges inductively. During the analytic phase, researchers record their interpretations in integrative memos, visuals, and balancing matrices. Grounded theory was used in a year-long study of a cross-disciplinary writing center and is now being used to study student and faculty perceptions of televised writing instruction. The promise it holds for composition research is significant: (1) it is theory as process, not a perfected product; (2) it goes beyond description to explanation and interpretation; (3) being inclusive, it works well with research teams; (4) it teases out the political and social components affecting writing and teaching; and (5) it is flexible and open so that additional data can be incorporated over time. (Contains a figure representing college writing and eight references.) (TB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

Conference on College Composition and Communication
March 27-30, 1996, Milwaukee, WI
Session B.19: Research Methods and Results

Grounded Theory: Research as Praxis

Joyce Neff Magnotto
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA 32529-0078
JNM100F@hamlet.bal.odu.edu

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Magnotto

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Definition & brief history of Grounded Theory:

In the mid 1960s, two social scientists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, developed grounded theory as a systematic and rigorous method of qualitative data analysis leading to "the discovery of theory from data" (The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Chicago: Aldine, 1967, 1). In Grounded Theory, the researcher applies a defined set of coding procedures to the data until a provisional theory emerges inductively. During the analytic phase, researchers record their interpretations in integrative memos, visuals, and balancing matrices. The analyses that survive the coding process have rich, explanatory promise, especially for complicated social practices such as writing and teaching.

My search of the ERIC data base from 1982-94 shows twelve composition studies using Grounded Theory. Some examples: how sixth graders define themselves as readers (Sherry Guice), how veteran teachers reconceived the value of dialogue journals when confronted with student responses to the journals (Patricia Gross), how a novice researcher redefines herself as she produces a dissertation using grounded theory (Kimberly White), and the perceptions of two researchers on their collaborative efforts (Louise M. Smith).

The abstracts of these studies indicate the reflexive nature of Grounded Theory. Researchers using Grounded Theory are always aware of their situatedness within the methodological paradigm. Questioning is not necessarily resolved nor closed by this methodology. People practicing Grounded Theory learn to live without closure, or they find other methodologies better suited to their research styles.

Description of the Methodology:

Grounded theory aims to organize the many ideas which emerge from systematic data analysis and then to generate theory which is tested through further recursive analysis. For those of us familiar with the notion of writing as a recursive

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

process, the iterative nature of grounded theory will seem quite familiar.

Actually, in doing Grounded Theory, the activities of collecting data, analyzing data, and writing up the research often occur simultaneously. The process both reflexive and recursive. Researchers usually involve their subjects in the analysis.

All types of data may be collected, both quantitative and qualitative. Analysis begins with the researcher holding conversations with the data and thinking about any regularities or patterns in the data base that relate to the research questions.

Moving toward theory involves coding, memoing, and diagramming procedures that depend on "constant comparison." The two major operations are "unitizing" and "categorizing."

Unitizing means deciding what will constitute a "unit" of information in the data base. In linguistic research this might be a word, clause, t-unit, etc. In writing research, "chunks of meaning" work well as units. The researcher reads the data base and decides where one chunk ends and another begins. Chunks are then labeled to indicate source, type of respondent, site, and episode. The researcher's experience in the site under study (classroom, writing center, etc.) is made use of in these procedures.

Categorizing involves first grouping similar chunks into categories; second, writing rules that describe the category; and third, assigning future chunks or units based on the rule rather than on the "looks like or feels like" procedure used initially.

Anomalies, conflicts, and other inadequacies will become evident. Through additional coding procedures, categories, category names and rules are massaged until Core Categories emerge and can be dimensionalized (agent, tactics/strategies, structural conditions, consequences). Finally the researcher returns to the whole data base for theoretical sampling of the core categories.

Applications:

In 1991, I used Grounded Theory to complete a year-long study of a cross-disciplinary writing center, and I am now using grounded theory to study student and faculty perceptions of televised writing instruction.

In my current study I am developing a matrix of the tensions

instructors and students balance when writing is taught from a distance. The study addresses three questions:

1. What notions of themselves as students do members of a Teletechnet composition course construct?
2. What notions of themselves as writers do members of a Teletechnet composition course construct?
3. What are the implications of distance learning for composition pedagogy?

I am also supervising 12 MA students enrolled in a research seminar on the "sites and scenes of writing." They are applying grounded theory methods to a range of topics:

- Basic Writing in an Alternative School Setting: how students who fail the Va Passport Literacy Test are remediated
- How Children with Autism Learn to Write
- Written Combat Communication: Can We Communicate Intent and Urgency Via Computer Interface
- A Case Study of a Non-fiction Writer
- Case Studies of Writing Apprehension in the REAP Program at Norfolk State University
- Writing classified documents in a Department of Defense consulting organization
- How a Teacher's Personal Practice of Writing Informs Her/his Classroom Instruction in Composition
- How a reporter writes articles on AIDS

The promise Grounded Theory holds for Composition Research:

1. Grounded Theory is "theory as process; that is, theory as an ever-developing entity, not as a perfected product" (Glaser & Strauss, Discovery 32).
2. Grounded Theory goes beyond description to explanation, interpretation, and application. In contrast to logically deduced theory that may or may not be based in empirical research, Grounded Theory is "phenomenological" and likely to have better "fit" and "working capacity" to explain things to both researchers and practitioners. (Discovery 6)
3. Grounded Theory is "inclusive" rather than "exclusive." It works well when teams of researchers and practitioners work together (including grad students and the individuals being studied).
4. Grounded Theory promotes the teasing out of political and social components affecting writing/teaching. It doesn't require the hiding or demoting of certain features to make points about other features of a writing site. The balancing

matrices allow multiple factors to be incorporated "at a glance." [look at sample matrix here]

5. Grounded Theory is flexible and open so that additional data, perhaps from additional sites or subjects, can be incorporated over time to enrich the explanatory and predictive power of an emerging theory. Expanding and deepening one's theory becomes the ongoing challenge for the researcher.

Finally, the distinction which Anselm Strauss makes concerning substantive theory and formal theory suggests that Grounded Theory can work to transcend the boundaries between local and general knowledge. Grounded Theory may also offer a means of meta-analysis across studies, and I believe it is an excellent avenue for long-term research agendas that can enrich our discipline.

Suggested Readings

Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. Chicago: Aldine, 1967.

Lincoln, Yvonna S. and Egon G. Guba. Naturalistic Inquiry. London: Sage, 1985.

Lather, Patti. "Research as Praxis." Harvard Educational Review 56.3 (Aug. 1986): 257-77.

Magnotto, Joyce Neff. "The Construction of College Writing in a Cross-disciplinary, Community College Writing Center." Diss. U of Pennsylvania, 1991.

Magnotto, Joyce Neff. "Grounded Theory: A Critical Research Methodology for Composition Studies." Composition Research as Critical Practice. Eds. Christine Farris and Chris Anson. (forthcoming)

Spigelman, Candace. "Conflicts of Ownership in Writing Response Groups and Their Revision Practices." Diss. Temple U, 1996.

Strauss, Anselm L. Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists. New York: Cambridge UP, 1987.

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990.

Figure 1: Representations of College Writing

	Student representations	Tutor representations	Faculty representations	Writing Center Constructs
Audience	Teacher as examiner	(1) Teacher as examiner (2) Interested, non-expert readers	Teacher as examiner	(1) Teacher as examiner (2) Tutor as interested reader (3) Writer as reader
Purpose	To earn a grade by satisfying a professor.	(1) To display knowledge (2) To learn content (3) To learn to write (4) To communicate one's ideas	(1) To test learning (2) To teach content (3) To assist student learning	(1) To satisfy the professor/institution (2) To meet writer & reader needs
Products	Content and form are separable. Writing is right or wrong.	Content + Form. Professors want deductive, thesis-driven essays, relatively free of error.	Formal products "count." Writing-to-learn products "uncountable." Ideal texts vs student texts.	Institutional constraints determine form & content.
Process	Linear, mysterious, painful, constrained by slippery rules, solitary. Revision = polishing.	Recursive, messy. HOCS & LOCS. Revision = meaning-making	A means to the product rather than a means of developing the writer.	Collaborative, social. Strategies can be taught & learned by moving between the particular and general.
Student as writer	Students are students, not writers.	Students can also be writers.	Unexamined dimension	Students can be constructed as writers.



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Paper presented at the 1996 Annual 4C's Convention (Milwaukee)	
Grounded Theory: Research as Praxis	
Author(s): Joyce Neff Magnotto	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: March 27-30, 1996

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following two options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all **Level 1** documents

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all **Level 2** documents

☒
↑
**Check here
For Level 1 Release:**
Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical) and paper copy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 1

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 2

☐
↑
**Check here
For Level 2 Release:**
Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical), but *not* in paper copy.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at **Level 1**.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Sign
here→
please

Signature: 	Printed Name/Position/Title: Joyce Neff Magnotto, Ph.D Assistant Prof. of English	
Organization/Address: English Dept. Old Dominion University Norfolk, VA 23529-0078	Telephone: (757)683-4012	FAX: (757)683-3241
	E-Mail Address: jnm100f@hamlet.bal. odu.edu	Date: 7/10/96

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
N/A
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
N/A
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:	<i>Acquisitions</i> ERIC/REC 2805 E. Tenth Street Smith Research Center, 150 Indiana University Bloomington, IN 47408
---	--

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

~~ERIC Processing and Reference Facility~~
~~1301 Piccard Drive, Suite 100~~
~~Rockville, Maryland 20850-4305~~

Telephone: 301-258-5500
FAX: 301-948-3695
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov